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Centre, KP trade blame over Tirah displacement

• Evacuation agreed upon after exhaustive jirgas that also included local admin and security officials became an issue only after people's plight highlighted • Federal info ministry insists govt, army did not ask anyone to leave their homes • CM's aide claims KP govt not taken on board • January 25 'deadline' passes by as evacuation drive on hold due to harsh weather

By Manzoor Ali

PESHAWAR: After hundreds of Tirah residents vacated their homes ahead of planned military action against terrorists who have overrun the tribal district, the federal and provincial governments on Sunday traded barbs over who authorised the evacuation process.

The evacuations, which were carried out in line with a plan agreed upon by all stakeholders — including local elders, the provincial government and the military — seem to have become a bone of contention only after the displaced populace found themselves stranded in inclement weather under open skies, with mismanagement by the authorities only adding to their troubles.

The decision to move the civilian population out of Tirah was reached last month, after several meetings between the local jirga and security and administration officials. During these negotiations, which lasted weeks, it was decided that the valley would be evacuated for a final operation to rid the area of outlaws who had been interfering with the social fabric.

CM vows to oppose decisions made behind 'closed doors': Page 9

According to the agreement, the evacuation was to be completed by Jan 25, and residents could expect to start returning to their homes by April 2026. However, the deadline lapsed on Sunday, days after the authorities halted the evacuation process due to cold weather and snow storms.

At the same time, both the provincial and federal governments have seemingly distanced themselves from the displacement drive, blaming each other instead.

As the KP government disowned the proposed operation, the federal information ministry led by Attaullah Tarar — in a lengthy statement issued on Sunday — claimed that the assertions were aimed at

Continued on Page 9

MOHMAND: Mountains are covered in white after heavy snowfall in the Yousaf Baba area of Upper Prang Ghar, in this tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—Dawn

Report on Page 3

CEC overstays his welcome due to lack of succession plan

• Raja, two ECP members have now been in their posts one year beyond the length of their tenure • NA opposition leader's notification removes key hurdle for fresh appointments • Civil society urges starting consultation process immediately

SITUATIONER

By Iftikhar A. Khan in Islamabad

CHIEF Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and two other Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) members are set to complete one year in office after the expiry of their constitutionally-mandated five-year terms.

The terms of the three officials ended on Jan 26, 2025. Under Article 215(4) of the Constitution, appointments to these posts were required within 45 days after the positions became vacant, ie by March 12, 2025.

However, a proviso inserted into Article 215(1) through the 26th Constitutional Amendment allows the CEC and members to continue until their successors are appointed. The incumbent CEC and two ECP members are serving under this provision, while the process to appoint replacements has yet to begin.

For months, the delay was partly attributed to the absence of an officially notified leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, who has a constitutional role to play in the process.

With Mehmood Khan Achakzai now notified as opposition leader after a prolonged delay, attention has shifted to how soon the government initiates appointments for the new chief election commissioner and ECP members from Sindh and Balochistan.

Muddasir Rizvi of the Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen), told *Dawn* that the notification of the opposition leader had removed a key procedural hurdle to initiating appointments to several constitutional and statutory offices that require mandatory consultation between the prime minister and the opposition leader.

He said such appointments included the chief election commissioner, ECP members, the chairman of the National Accountability Bureau, and the chairpersons of the National Commission on the Status of Women and the National Human Rights Commission.

Mr Rizvi said appointments to constitutional offices should be completed before posts fall vacant. While he acknowledged that the incumbents' continuation was constitutional under the amended provision, he urged that the process for appointing successors be initiated as soon as possible. He expressed hope that the issue would be addressed through a subsequent constitutional amendment.

Ahmad Bilal Mehboob, president of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat), said the process to appoint a new chief election commissioner should start forthwith and the prime minister should take the initiative.

He recalled that the process had been initiated by the prime minister but could not move forward as the then opposition leader Omar Ayub wanted the formation of a parliamentary committee on the appointments without the consultation process.

He also said an earlier draft of the 26th Amendment had included a provision for the reappointment of the chief

Continued on Page 5

Federal funding for provincial health schemes ruled out

Centre asks provinces to move towards contributory health insurance

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided it will not extend funding for provincial health coverage in any form, including insurance, in strict compliance with the 18th Constitutional Amendment and asked the provinces to consider providing full-fledged health insurance on a contributory basis.

The decision comes in the wake of recent engagements and approvals for extending the Prime Minister's Sehat Sahulat Programme (SSP), valued at about Rs40 billion, to three federally administered territories: the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), launched earlier this month.

Against this backdrop, internal proposals to include the population of Sindh's impoverished Tharparkar district under the SSP were not supported.

It was argued during meetings of the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) and the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec), on the recommendation of a special committee constituted by the prime minister, that the inclusion of a single district would open the door for similar demands from other provinces, even though health is a devolved subject, documents seen by *Dawn* show.

NFC award blamed for provinces missing tax targets: Page 3

At a high-level meeting chaired by the prime minister on Jan 2, the continuation of the programme beyond June 30, 2025, was approved until June 30, 2027 "for AJK, GB and ICT only", according to a Prime Minister's Office directive dated Jan 9, 2026.

Subsequently, the modified programme with a revised capital cost of Rs40.2bn was approved by

Continued on Page 5

Pakistani lawmakers press US counterparts on visa curbs

• Mandviwalla, Hassan lead push to exit 75-nation restrictive list; express confidence hurdles will be resolved soon • Senators urge direct parliament-to-parliament ties to boost trust; highlight need for a strategic partnership

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: A high-level Pakistani parliamentary delegation have urged US lawmakers this week to remove their country from a list of nations subject to strict immigration visa restrictions, calling the current classification a significant hurdle in diplomatic relations.

Led by Senators Saleem H. Mandviwalla and Rana Mahmoodul Hassan, the delegation travelled to Washington to strengthen legislative ties and address specific bilateral concerns. Experts from various sectors, including trade and business, were also part of the group.

The central focus of the dialogue was Pakistan's inclusion among 75 nations whose citizens face heightened scrutiny and difficulties obtaining visas.

"Pakistan's inclusion in the list of 75 countries whose nationals face visa difficulties is a serious issue," Mr Mandviwalla said. "We hope this will soon be resolved and Pakistan's name will be removed."

To bolster their argument, Mr Mandviwalla cited advice from the US ambassador in Islamabad, who suggested clarifying to members of Congress that Pakistani Americans typically do not rely on social welfare benefits.

Dr Gholam Mujtaba, whose Pakistan Policy Institute USA organised the visit, noted that the diaspora is among the 10 most prosperous demographic groups in the United States.

"I raised this key point with the lawmakers," Mr Mandviwalla said. "They understood our position, and after these talks, I can say with confidence that Pakistan will be removed from the list."

The delegation met US lawmakers at the Rayburn House Office Building as part of an Inter-Parliamentary Group session. Rep. Estes praised the delegates for their efforts to bridge the legislative bodies. He also acknowledged Pakistan's cooperation with

Continued on Page 5

India afraid peace board may try to 'resolve Kashmir'

• Diplomats, press divided over New Delhi's perceived reluctance to join Trump-led body • Given his propensity to paint himself as a global peacemaker, *The Hindu* warns US president may offer to mediate Kashmir dispute

Monitoring Desk

DESPITE being invited to join the 'Board of Peace' by President Donald Trump, India has yet to formally get involved in the process.

Conspicuous by its absence from the Davos ceremony where 20 world leaders — including Trump and Pakistan's PM Shehbaz Sharif — signed the board's charter, some in India are viewing New Delhi's reluctance through the lens of the Kashmir dispute.

President Trump says the board's goal is to make the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza permanent and oversee an interim government in the Palestinian territory.

PRESIDENT Trump shows the signed charter of the 'Board of Peace' in Davos.—Reuters

"This is not just for America, but for the whole world. I think we can spread it to other places. Like we did successfully in Gaza," he had said at the time.

But there seems to be concern among some circles that if India signs up for the board — which Trump envisions as a future replacement for the United Nations — it may open up the disputed territory of held Kashmir to broader international or American scrutiny.

Activists slam Indian 'reign of terror' in held Kashmir: Page 5

Although Trump has repeatedly offered to mediate on the Kashmir issue, especially in the wake of the May 2025 flare-up between the two South Asian rivals, New Delhi has firmly opposed all such overtures thus far.

According to a *BBC Hindi* report, the 'Board of Peace' is being formed at a time when the US is withdrawing from several UN organisations, raising the question of whether the board aims to render the world body irrelevant.

There is also a concern among some circles that the board will only strengthen a unipolar world, a system currently dominated by the US.

In a recent editorial on the issue, *The Hindu* newspaper painted Pakistan's decision to join the board as "a warning signal to India".

The newspaper attributed its alarm to the US president's propensity to playing the 'peacemaker', having already claimed to have solved multiple regional and global conflicts during his first year in office.

"…[I]f Trump decides to include the Kashmir dispute in [his] peace plans, the Peace Board will try to resolve it. Once it joins the board, it will also be difficult for India to object to the deployment of its troops in the international peacekeeping force," the editorial noted.

Former Indian ambassador to the United Nations, Syed Akbaruddin, recently wrote in the *Times of India* that the Security Council resolution has determined the term of this board is until Dec 31, 2027, and that it is obliged to report to the Security Council every six months.

This is done to ensure that this temporary arrangement does not turn into a permanent global model, he noted, adding that by contrast, Trump's peace plan seems to have no set term and "could be

Continued on Page 11

Panjgur IBO leaves three terrorists dead: ISPR

Dawn Report

QUETTA/GWADAR: Security forces killed three alleged terrorists including a local commander of a banned outfit in an intelligence-based operation in Panjgur district of Balochistan, the military media wing said on Sunday.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "On January 25 (Sunday), security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in Panjgur district of Balochistan, on [the] reported presence of terrorists belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al Hindustan."

Fitna al Hindustan is the state-designated term for Balochistan-based terror groups, allegedly supported by India to target military personnel in Pakistan.

The statement said that during the conduct of the operation, the security forces effectively engaged the terrorists' location, and after an "intense fire exchange, three Indian sponsored terrorists were eliminated".

Among the killed was a local terrorist commander, Farooq alias Soro, the ISPR said.

"Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area."

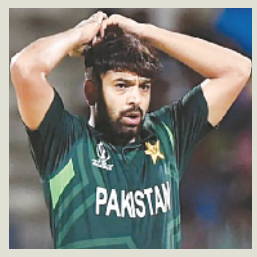
It stated that sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate

Continued on Page 5

ON OTHER PAGES

Islamabad's one-stop facility feted

Citizens of Islamabad are welcoming the launch of the Asaan Khidmat Centre — a one-stop facility offering more than 60 services under a single roof, such as passport, Nadra, domicile, verification of documents, registration of marriage, birth and death etc. But amid the optimism, many wonder how long these high standards can be sustained in the long run. **Page 4**



Haris dropped from Pakistan T20 squad

An experienced 15-member Pakistan squad has been announced for the T20 World Cup to be held in India and Sri Lanka from Feb 7, with Babar Azam recalled while Haris Rauf and Mohammad Wasim Jr left out. Salman Ali Agha has been named captain. The squad was announced by national selector Aaqib Javed alongside Salman and head coach Mike Hesson. **Page 18**

Plus...

BUSINESS & FINANCE